

PILATE AND OURSELVES GUILTY OF THE SAVIOR'S DEATH

NO. 1648

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, MARCH 5, 1882,
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult
was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the
multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person:
see you to it. Then answered all the people, and said,
His blood be on us, and on our children.”
Matthew 27:24, 25.*

THE crucifixion of Christ was the crowning sin of our race. In His death we shall find all the sins of mankind uniting in foul conspiracy. Envy and pride and hate are there, with covetousness, falsehood, and blasphemy, eager to rush on to cruelty, revenge, and murder. The devil awakened around the seed of the woman the iniquities of us all, they compassed the Lord about; yes they compassed Him about like bees. All the evils of human hearts of all ages were concentrated around the cross, even as all the rivers run into the sea, and as all the clouds empty themselves upon the earth, so did all the crimes of man gather to the slaying of the Son of God. It seemed as if hell held a formal reception and all the various forms of sin came flocking to the rendezvous, army upon army they hastened to the battle. As the vultures hasten to the body, so the flocks of sins came to make the Lord their prey. By all the assembled troops of sins there was consummated the foulest crime which the sun has ever beheld. By wicked hands they did crucify and slay the Savior of the world.

We have been singing two hymns in which we took to ourselves a share of the guilt of our Lord's death. We sang—

*“Oh, the sharp pangs of smarting pain
My dear Redeemer bore,
When knotty whips and rugged thorns
His sacred body tore.
But knotty whips and rugged thorns
In vain do I accuse;
In vain I blame the Roman bands
And the more spiteful Jews.
'Twas you, my sins, my cruel sins,
His chief tormentors were;
Each of my crimes became a nail,
And unbelief the spear.”*

And then after the same manner we sorrowfully asked a question, and sang a penitential reply—

*“My Jesus! Who with spit vile
Profaned Your sacred brow?
Or whose unpitying scourge has made
Your precious blood to flow?
'Tis I have thus ungrateful been,
Yet, Jesus, pity take!
Oh, spare and pardon me, my Lord,
For Your sweet mercy's sake!”*

Perhaps some of you hardly understand what you have been singing. But others of us have sincerely and intelligently pleaded guilty of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. We know that He not only suffered for our transgressions, but by our iniquities. This is not clear to a great many, and I would not have them pretend that it is. They cannot see that they have anything to do with the matter of Jesus' death, and therefore they are not moved to repentance by hearing of it. Indeed, they imitate the example of Pilate in our text, when he took water and washed his hands before the multitude and said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person.” The object of our present discourse will be to awaken slumbering consciences.

es. Without going into any metaphysical questions as to whether such a man did or did not actually have a share in the particular action by which Jesus died, I shall show you that in many ways men practically commit a like crime, and so prove that they have similar dispositions to those ancient Kill-Christ's. Though they repudiate the crucifixion, they repeat it, if not in form, yet in spirit. Though Jesus is not here in flesh and blood, yet the cause of holiness and truth and His divine Spirit are still among us, and men act towards the kingdom of Christ, which is set up among them, in the same way as the Jews and Romans acted towards the incarnate God. True, all men are not alike against Him, for the Lord spoke of some who have "the greater sin," and few are as guilty as the traitor Judas, that son of perdition, but in every form of it the rejection of Christ is a great sin, and it will be a great gospel blessing if it is repented of after the fashion of the prophet when he said, "They shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for Him, as one that is in bitterness for his first-born."

I shall now take up the story of our Lord's appearance before Pilate, from the moment of His being sent back to Herod to the time when He was delivered to the Jews to be led away for crucifixion, and I shall try to exhibit by this narrative several ways in which men virtually put the Christ to death, and therefore become partakers of the ancient transgression which was committed at Jerusalem.

I. First, there are some—and these are they who have the greater sin—who are DETERMINEDLY AND AVOWEDLY THE OPPONENTS OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST. These are the men who are represented by the chief priests and elders of the Jews, who of old sought the Savior's blood, because they could not endure His teaching. Nothing else would satisfy them but that He should be removed from the earth, for He was a standing protest against their evil deeds. They hated Him because by His light their wicked lives were reprov'd. These were the true murderers of Christ, who gloried in their shame and defied the punishment of it, crying, "His blood be on us, and on our children." We still have among us those who cannot endure the teaching of our Lord Jesus. His very name seems to excite their worst passions. They rave at the mention of Him. Oh, the atrocious things that some have said of late of the Christ of God. They have gone out of their way to insult Him. If anyone else had been slandered as He has been, society would not have tolerated the loathsome tongues. Accusations against Jehovah and His Son would seem to be delectable morsels to modern blasphemers, dainties upon which they feed greedily. My flesh trembles when I think of the hard speeches which the ungodly still utter against Him who in the day of His humiliation endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself. Many of these slanders would have been absurd, and to be dismissed with utter contempt, if it were not for the guilt of the men themselves, for in these speeches we see that the poison of asps is under their lips, their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. They do not treat so the heroes of war, the philosophers of antiquity, nor even the notorious scourges of the race. To all of these they show some candor, and often award honors which are doubtfully due, but when they touch upon the person and life of our blessed Lord, candor and honesty are dismissed, anything like an attempt to understand Him is refused, and He and His are treated with ridicule, misrepresentation, and falsehood. They heap up their coarsest epithets, they put the worst interpretation upon His words, and they give the vilest misrepresentations of His deeds, and attribute to Him motives to which He was an utter stranger. Such men are among us, clamoring to be heard. There have been unbelievers and deriders of Jesus in all times, but just now the race is of fouler speech than usual. Once infidelity was philosophical and thoughtful, and great names were to be found upon her roll, but now her noisiest advocates are bullies after the manner of Tom Paine, men who seem to delight in wounding the feelings of the godly and crushing every sacred thing under their feet. These are the true followers of the men whose mouths were full of, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him!" They cannot endure that Jesus should be remembered, much less revered. They claim to be "liberal," and to be large-hearted towards all religions, but their unmitigated scorn of the faith of Jesus is displayed on every possible occasion, proving that the spirit of persecution burns within them. It would be idle for these to say that they would not crucify Christ, for they do crucify Him to the utmost of their power by their profane speeches against Him.

A certain number's main attack is aimed against the royal authority and reigning power of the Lord Jesus. They exclaim against Him because He claims universal sovereignty. They might not object so much to Christianity as one of various creeds, but as it claims to be supreme they will have nothing to do with it. The Roman Senate was willing to set up Jesus in the Pantheon, among other gods, but when they learned that Christ claimed to be worshipped alone, and then He was denied a place in the circle of adoration. If the gospel claims to be truth, and judges other systems to be false, straightway it arouses the opposition of the broad school. We have men among us today who say, "Yes, there is something good in

Christianity just as there is in Buddhism." Of this precious Buddhism they seem of late to be wonderfully fond, any idol will suit men so long as they can be rid of the living God. A Christ who will be everything or nothing is not to their taste. When He says that He will utterly demolish the idols, and break His enemies in pieces as with a rod of iron, they give Him the cold shoulder, for they are distinctly the enemies of Jesus Christ if He is set forth as Lord of all.

And we have some of milder cast who, nevertheless, join with this band, for their opposition is to the deity of Christ. These in effect cry, "We have a law, and by our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God." They grow indignant over the claims which Christians advance for their God and Savior. Christ the best of men, Christ the noblest of prophets, Christ near akin to Deity, possibly a delegated God, they will go as far as that, but further they will not stir. "That all men should honor the Son even as they honor the Father" is not to their mind. If Jesus is preached as "very God of very God," straightway we hear from them the cry, "Away with Him! Away with Him!" When we proclaim Jesus as King upon God's holy hill of Zion, and say of Him, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever," they refuse to bow before His divine majesty. They do, so far as they are able, destroy the divinity of Christ and reduce Him to a mere man. How can such people blame the Jews and the Romans? They could but slay His manhood, but these would destroy His deity. Is not their guilt as great? I charge all deniers of the Godhead of our Lord with being, as far as they can be, His murderers, for they strike at His noblest nature by assailing His divine power and godhead. May the Spirit of God be here to convince them of their error and lead them to worship Jesus, who is exalted at the right hand of the Father.

I must charge home the accusation in the name of God and truth. Avowed opposers of Christ, had they been alive in the days of His flesh, would have wished Him to be put to death, for, so far as they are concerned, He is either dead to them in His true character, or else they are doing their best in their own conscience and upon the conscience of others to sweep Him out of existence. If they say they would not have put Jesus to a literal death on the cross, I say they are putting Him to a death which He would deprecate even more, namely, the destruction of all His influence over the minds of men. By decrying His atonement by which He reconciles men to God, by setting men's hearts against Him and causing them to refuse His salvation, these men do as far as they can, rob Him of the joy that was set before Him, for which He endured the cross, despising the shame. Is this nothing? Put me to death if you will, for I shall live when I am dead by the words which I have spoken. I should count it a far worse murder if you could sweep out of men's minds all that I have taught and overthrow all the good which I have attempted to do. And if it is so of a mere man, much more must it be so of Jesus—that merely to murder Him upon the cross is comparatively little compared with declaring, "We will not be influenced by Him, nor believe in Him as Savior and God, and to the best of our power we will prevent others from believing in Him." What a wretched objective for a man to live for, what a horrible fame for a man to seek after—to stamp out the gospel of Jesus. Terrible will be the punishment of this sin. Oh, opponent of Jesus, instead of being less guilty than the Jews of our Lord's day, you are even more culpable. You are not slaying Him in one way, but you are doing it in another, and the crime is the same in spirit. I see a mystic cross to which your cruel words nail my Lord, I see before my mental eyes a Calvary whereon the Lord Jesus is crucified afresh and put to an open shame by infidel sarcasms and skeptical insinuations, I see Him derided and made nothing of by those who deny His deity and refuse to believe in His sacrifice. Enough of this. May conscience be present here, and the Spirit of God be present too, that men may not dare to wash their hands in innocence if they have been the open antagonists of Jesus and still are so. Oh that you would turn to Him, and become His disciples. His beauties are such that they might well charm every honest heart. His teaching is so tenderly reasonable, so full of sweetness and of light, that it is marvelous that men do not receive it with joy. His cross is unique—a bleeding sufferer, bearing offenses that were not His own, that His own enemies might live! The conception is so strange that it could never have originated in the selfish mind of fallen man. It bears its own witness on its brow. Woe unto those that fight against it, for it shall cost them dearly. He that stumbles upon this stone shall be broken, but upon whomever this stone shall fall it shall grind him to powder. See what came to these Jewish people, they were themselves crucified by Titus in such numbers that they could no longer find wood enough for their execution. Jerusalem destroyed is the result of Jesus crucified. Beware, you that fight against Him, for the omnipotent Father will take up His quarrel, and all the forces of creation and of providence will be at His command to wage war for truth and righteousness. The Nazarene has triumphed, and He will triumph even to the end, when He shall have all His enemies under His feet. O you that hate Him, be wise early and close the hopeless contest in which you chiefly fight against your own souls.

II. I hope there are not many here to whom this first part of my sermon applies. We will advance to a second point. Pilate, having a conscience which troubled him, was exceedingly anxious not to put Jesus to death, and yet could not see how he could avoid doing so, seeing that the Jews threatened to accuse him of lack of loyalty to Caesar, and that Caesar the gloomy tyrant Tiberius, who was unrelenting in his fury. After first sending his prisoner to Herod, he finds that he cannot escape in that way, and therefore he grasps at a second hope. He tells the mob that the custom of the feast required that one prisoner should be released, and that the choice remained with them. He hopes that they will choose Jesus of Nazareth. A vain hope indeed! It so happened that there was another Jesus in prison at the time, namely, Jesus Barabbas, who had been a murderer, and was guilty both of sedition and robbery. Pilate brings out the two and he gives the Jews their choice. It would make a wonderful picture if it were really so, as a writer on the Life of Christ suggests, that Pilate actually set the two individuals before the crowd. See there the dark-browed, scowling assassin, with fierce looks, and every mark of fury and hate upon his face, the man taken red-handed, familiar with blood, the brigand whose very profession was strife! There he stands like a wolf, and by his side is set the gentle Lamb of God. See there in His face and bearing, all that is good, tender, benevolent, heroic. The incarnations of hate and love are before them, and Pilate gives the crowd their choice. Without hesitation they cry, "Not this man, but Barabbas." "Now, Barabbas was a robber." The murderer walks away free, and the innocent Jesus is left to die. In this I shall have to impeach a second class of men **IN THE MATTER OF THEIR CHOICE**. Many among us have by divine grace chosen Jesus to be our Savior, King, and Lord. He is the groundwork of our eternal hope, and the spring of our present joy, we have selected Christ to be the guide and leader of our lives, and we are not ashamed of the choice. It has been made deliberately and solemnly, and we renew it from day to day—

*"High heaven that heard the solemn vow,
That vow renewed shall daily hear,
Till in life's latest hour we bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."*

I fear that some among you have not chosen Christ. But what have you chosen? Let me mention two or three objects of human choice, worthy to be ranked with Barabbas of old. Too many have chosen *lust* to be their delight. I will not paint the hideous monster. I have no colors. It is a foul and bestial thing. The cheek of modesty blushes at the very mention of it. Yet, for the pleasures of wantonness, Christ is set aside. For the strange woman many a man has thrown away his soul, and chosen infamy instead of glory! I half excuse the Jews for choosing Barabbas when I see a man obeying the lusts of the flesh instead of Christ, and yet I am probably addressing individuals who secretly indulge their baser passions, and are thereby held back from becoming decided Christians. They know they cannot be followers of Christ and yet indulge in wantonness and chambering, and therefore for this vile self-indulgence they let Jesus go.

Very frequently I meet with persons who have chosen another Barabbas instead of Jesus. What if, to borrow from heathenism, I call it Bacchus? *Drink* is the demon which enthralls millions. It is a vice which degrades men, and defaces the image of God in them. We insult the brutes when we say that a drunken man sinks to the level of the beasts, for the cattle never go as low as that. Alas, I have known men—yes, and women, too—who have been hearers of the gospel, and have in a measure felt its power, and yet for this sin they have sold their souls and given up their Savior. No drunk has eternal life abiding in him, and to speak plain English, there are professing Christians who deserve to be called by that name. I say that they prefer the drink-demon to the holy Lord Jesus. You condemn the Jews for choosing Barabbas? Where will you find a counselor to plead for you when you choose drunkenness? If it was sinful for them to choose a murderer, what must it be for you to choose this cursed vice, which murders its hundreds of thousands? Oh, this national vice of ours, is the vice which makes this nation a byword and a proverb among the nations of the earth! What shall I say of it? And is this to be set in rivalry with my Lord? Oh, shame, cruel shame that this should be selected in preference to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us!

"Well, well," says one, "I do not fall into that sin." No, my friend, but what is it that you do choose instead of Christ, for if you do not set Him on the throne of your heart, you are choosing something else. Is it that you do not want to be a Christian because you wish to save yourself trouble and would be happy and comfortable and enjoy yourself? You do not choose any openly vicious way in particular, but you prefer to be moderately sinful and to take care of yourself, and save all care, thought, and anxiety about death and heaven and hell. You think that by leading a careless life you are happier than if you

yielded yourself to Jesus? You are laboring under a mistake, but one thing is clear—self is your god, and that is a deity as groveling as any other. The idolater, who worships a god of gold or silver, or even of stone or mud, is not quite as degraded as the man who worships himself. Self-worship is coming very low, indeed. When I am my own god, or my belly is my god, can there be a lower depth? If I live merely to be easy and comfortable, and have no care for God, or Christ, or heavenly things, what a choice I am making. Think of it, and be ashamed. Oh, I say again, in many a man's choice of what should be the object of his life, he sins precisely as they sinned who put away Jesus and chose Barabbas. I say no more. May the Holy Spirit send home this sadly convicting truth.

III. Thirdly. Pilate, seeing that he cannot, thus, set his prisoner free, gives Him over into the hands of the soldiers, who straightway make merry over Him and treat Him as an object of contempt. The words are cruel, and are enough to draw tears from all eyes as we read them, "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe." "I am innocent here," cries one of my hearers. What! Are you quite sure that you are free from THE SIN OF CONTEMPT AND OF CAUSING PAIN TO JESUS? Listen a while. When you have been so busy about the world that you could not think of Him, when you have been so eager to be rich that you laughed at the true riches, do you not know that you were twisting a crown of thorns to put upon His head? Your folly in despising your own soul sorely wounds Him. He pities you, and cannot bear to see that the thorns of this world should be the harvest which you sow and reap. If He were not so loving of heart and tender of spirit it would not matter, but this unkindness to yourself is unkindness to Him, and virtually when you have been full of cares and anxieties concerning the world, and have had no care and no anxiety about Him or about your own soul, you have put a crown of thorns upon His head. Is this nothing?

Let me ask you when you have gone up to the place of worship on Sunday, as you always do, and have pretended to adore Him, though you do not love Him, do you know what you have done? You have mocked Him by a feigned worship, and thus you have put the purple robe upon Him. For that purple robe meant that they made Him a nominal king, a king who was not in truth a king, but a mere show. Your Sunday religion, which has been forgotten in the week, has been a scepter of reed, a powerless ensign, a mere sham. You have mocked and insulted Him even in your hymns and prayers, for your religion is a pretense with no heart in it. You brought Him an adoration that was no adoration, a confession that was no confession, and a prayer that was no prayer. Is it not so? I pray you be honest with yourselves. Is it not so? And then all the week long have you not preferred anyone to Jesus, any book to the Bible, any exercise to prayer, any enjoyment to communion with Him? Political objects have awakened you, but not the Lord's glory nor the spread of His kingdom. Is not this despising Jesus? Is not this mocking Him?

Are there not among you some who are weary of the Lord? Weary of the Sabbath? Weary of sermons about Jesus? Weary of atoning blood? Weary of praising the Redeemer? What is this but contempt of Him?

Too many have even jested about the holiest of things, if they have not mocked Jesus personally they have ridiculed His people for His sake, and made mirth of His gospel. By some, religion is set up as a scarecrow, and piety is treated as a byword, conscientious scruples are laughed at as old-fashioned absurdities, and devotion to Christ is set down as next of kin to insanity. We know it is so, even among some who are hearers of the gospel, and outwardly its upholders. There is contempt for the life and power of it, they know and honor its name, but the reality of vital godliness they do not value. At times their conscience thunders heavily at them, and then they are compelled to wish they had what at other times they disdain. They do despise to the blood of Jesus, and yet would gladly be partakers in its pardoning power.

I fear none of us dare wash our hands of this as a sin of our fallen estate. Time was when those of us who love Jesus now, and could kiss every wound of His, yet thought so little of Him that anything was better than He. The story of His sufferings was as wearisome as a worn-out tale, and as for giving our whole selves to Him, we deemed it a fanatical expression or an enthusiastic dream. Blessed Savior, You have forgiven us. Forgive others who are doing the same.

IV. I have but a minute to spare for each point, so now I must turn to another sin of which many are guilty, namely, THE SIN OF HEARTLESSNESS WITH REGARD TO THE SUFFERINGS OF OUR LORD. Pilate thought he had another way of letting his prisoner go, and this he tried. He scourged Him. I will not tell you how dreadful Roman scourging was. It could not now be equaled except it is by the Russian whip. It was the most terrible of tortures. Many died under it, and almost all the victims fainted

after a few blows. By it the human frame was reduced to a mass of bruised, bleeding, quivering flesh. When the Savior was all a mass of wounds and bruises, Pilate brought Him forth and said, "Behold the man," appealing to what little humanity he hoped there still might be in the chief priests and elders. "Behold the man!" he said. "Is not this enough? He is crushed and battered and bleeding all over, is not this enough?" But they had no feeling for Him whatever, and only cried, "Away with Him." If the spectacle of woe which our Lord presented on this occasion does not touch you, it is a lamentable proof of hardness of heart. Do not many read the story of His sufferings without emotion?

Despised, reviled, crowned with thorns, and scourged, our Lord stands alone as the Man of Sorrows, the Monarch of miseries. Griefs without parallel! Woes unique and by themselves! Have you no tears to shed for Him whom soldiers mocked and Jews derided? No? Is it possible that you answer, "No"? Have you heard the story till it has less effect than an idle romance? For shame! For shame! And the worst of it is that it should not affect men when they remember that these griefs were voluntarily borne out of love, and not of necessity nor from any selfish motive. His woes were borne for His enemies. He bade His disciples begin to preach at Jerusalem that the men who spat in His face might know that they had a share in His compassion, and that he who drove the lance into His heart was one for whom He tasted death. He dies praying for His murderers. Ah me! That it should be so. A man dying for his friend is a noble sight, but a Man dying for those who put him to death is the most extraordinary sight that angels ever beheld.

There is this about it too, which touches believers most tenderly, our Lord suffered thus on our account. In His death is our hope, or else we are lost forever. If we have not part and lot in the merits of the agony, then for us there remains nothing but a fearful looking for judgment and of fiery indignation. Do we not mourn when we see Jesus dying for us? O feeling, you are fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason. Surely our hearts will be like the rock in Horeb. Stricken by the rod of the cross, our souls will gush with rivers of penitential grief. And here is a marvelous proof of our guilt, that we have compassion for everybody but the Savior; that we can cry over a lapdog, and yet can hear of Christ with utter indifference. There are multitudes of persons of this kind, and I pray God's Spirit to touch their conscience upon this matter of heartlessness toward Jesus.

But I must hasten on, though I might wish to linger, leaving with your meditations the enlargement of these charges.

V. There is another crime of which many are guilty which was seen in Pilate, and that was the crime of COWARDICE. No less than three times did Pilate say of our Lord, "I find no fault in Him," and yet he did not let Him go. He himself said, "I have power to crucify You, and have power to release You," and yet he dared not exercise the power to deliver. Through cowardice he dared not let his perfectly innocent prisoner go free. He knew, but he did not act up to his knowledge. Have I any before me whose knowledge of good things far outruns their practice? This, surely, will be one of the never-dying worms of hell—the gnawing of an instructed and disregarded conscience. Over the door of their prison, the lost shall read this inscription—"You knew your duty but you did it not." The knowledge which makes men responsible for their deeds increases that responsibility as it is itself increased, and with it their guilt and their punishment. Moreover, Pilate did not only know the right, but after his own fashion he wished to do it. One almost pities the vacillating coward. See how he struggles to release Jesus in some indirect fashion which may cost him nothing. He wishes, he resolves, and then he hangs back. Like a vessel tossed with contrary winds, he is at one time almost in harbor, and soon he is far out at sea. Oh, the quantities of dead wishes that one might gather in this Tabernacle, as men gather untimely fruit which the wind has shaken from the trees. Men wish to repent, wish to believe, wish to decide, wish to be holy, wish to be right with God, but their wishing leads to no practical decision, and so they perish at the threshold of mercy. Their goodness ends in empty desires, which do but evidence their responsibility, and so secure their condemnation. Yet, to be just, we must admit that Pilate did more than wish, he spoke for Christ. But having spoken in His favor he did not proceed to action, as he was bound to have done. It is possible for a man to say with his tongue, "I find no fault in Him," and then by his actions to condemn Jesus by giving Him up to die. Words are a poor homage to the Savior. Not by words does He save mankind, and not by lip service is He to be repaid. Pilate spoke boldly enough, and then retreated before the clamors of the crowd, and yet Pilate could be firm sometimes. When Jesus was nailed to the cross, the priests begged Pilate to change the accusation which was written over His head, and he would not, but replied, "What I have written, I have written." Why could he not have shown a little backbone when Jesus yet lived? He was not altogether such a weak, effeminate being as to be incapable of putting his foot down firmly. If he did so once, he might have done it before, and so have saved himself from

this great transgression. Are there any Pilates here—persons who would long ago have been Christians if they had possessed enough moral courage? Some foolish companion would laugh at them if they became religious, and this they could not bear. Poor dastards! I heard the other day of a lad who dared not pray in the room where two or three others slept, and so, like a coward, he crept into bed and succumbed to the fear of others. I fear that some men would sooner be damned than be laughed at. Another person has a wicked companion, and he knows that he must cut his acquaintance if he becomes a follower of Jesus, this he would do, but he lacks courage. O you who shrink back from that, which Christ's service involves, because of the fear of men, know you not the portion of the fearful? O you trembling ones, is Jesus covered with wounds and shame for you, and are you ashamed of Him? Death is coming upon Him speedily, and do you hide your faces from Him? This is cruelty, indeed, both to Christ and to yourself. Can you not leave His enemies? "Come you out from among them, and be you separate: touch not the unclean thing." Will you not espouse His cause? "If any man will serve Me, let him follow Me." By this cowardice you do as much as you are able to put the Christ to death. "How?" you ask. Well, suppose everybody acted as you do? Would there be any Christianity in the world? If everybody was cowardly, would there be a church at all? Are you not killing Christ and burying Christ as far as ever you can? Are you not destroying His influence and weakening His church by refusing to acknowledge Him? Is it not so? Look at it. Whatever influence you have in the world, you refuse to use for Jesus. Though multitudes are active in despising and opposing Him, you do not lift a hand in His favor. Why do you not come out and say, "I am on His side"? By your supposed neutrality you act as His foe. You must be on one side or the other now that you have heard the gospel, for Jesus has said, "He that is not with Me is against Me: he that gathers not with Me scatters abroad." You are against Him, and you are scattering abroad. Suppose others follow your example? "Well," you say, "there is nothing bad in my example, except that I am not a Christian." Just so, and under some aspects the very goodness of your example makes it operate all the more powerfully for evil. I do not think that the example of a thoroughly drunken man, for instance, leads many young people into intemperance. On the contrary, many take warning from the spectacle, and fly to total abstinence for security. I have often had young men and women coming to join the church who have been total abstainers of the most intense kind because a drunken father made their childhood so wretched, and kept the home so poor that they abhorred the accursed thing. See, then, how an evil example may lose its evil power by very excess. Yours is another case, your example is in some respects admirable, and then you throw it on the side of the devil. The better man you are the more mischief you are doing by siding with evil. Inasmuch as you are that which is moral, excellent, amiable, you are the very man whose influence Christ ought to have on His side, and if you cause it to go against Him the fact is all the more deplorable. If the weight of your character goes to make men ignore the claims of the Son of God, what is this but spiritually to compass His death?

VI. Lastly, and oh that the Spirit of God may bless this sharp medicine to some heart that it may feel the pangs of penitence this morning—there is the sin of SELF-RIGHTEOUS HYPOCRISY. This Pilate committed in set form. He took water and washed his hands and said, "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see you to it." What a contradiction! He is innocent, but he gives them permission to be guilty. They could not murder the Lord without his permission. He gives the necessary permit, and yet he says, "I am innocent." Do I not see another of the same class over yonder? He says, "I do not despise Christ, or speak a word against Him. I am perfectly innocent of any ill will towards Him. Of course, if others oppose Him they may, for it is a free country, let them do as they like, but I am perfectly clear of it." It is not the way that a man acts if he sees another being murdered. He does not look on and say that he would rather not interfere. You say you cannot help other people's opinions? Have you no opinion of Jesus of your own? Do you say, "No, I never think of Him"? Is not that contempt? Do you decline to hold any opinion about one who claims to be your God? About one who must be your Savior or you must perish forever? You cannot sheer off in that way. Now that rebellion is afoot you must either be loyal or be a traitor. The standard is unfurled, and each man must take his side. Your negligence of Jesus contradicts your claim to be neutral. You pretend to leave Him alone, but that leaving alone is fatal. A man is in yon upper room of a burning house, and you can save him. You refuse to touch the matter, for it is no concern of yours either way, and so you leave it to the firemen and their helpers. Meanwhile, the man perishes because you will not help him. I say that you are inexcusable, that man's blood lies at your door. It was your duty to have rescued him. So the Lord Jesus Christ comes here among men and He is persecuted. You quietly say, "No doubt it is a pity, but I cannot help it." Just so, but by your inaction you side with His foes.

Do you say that you are so righteous that you do not need a Savior? That, indeed, is smiting Him on the face. He comes to be a Savior and you tell Him that He is superfluous, that you are so good that you can do without being washed in His blood. That is spitting in His face, and telling Him that He was a fool to die for you. Why should He shed His blood if you are innocent enough without it? In effect you charge God with folly for providing a great propitiation when such good people as you are need nothing of the kind. I do not believe anybody can more grossly insult the Son of the Highest! This is crucifying Him indeed! The self-righteous man who says, "I am clean," deprives Christ's sacrifice of its glory, His life of its end, His person of its dignity, His whole work of its wisdom. The very heart of God is set upon the objective for which Christ died, and yet the self-righteous man counts this a folly.

Come, my hearers, there is no room for any of us to accuse his fellow, let us all come with humble confessions to the feet of Jesus, now risen from the dead, and let us each say to Him right sorrowfully—

*"Tis I to whom these pains belong,
'Tis I should suffer for my wrong.
Bound hand and foot in heavy chains
Your scourge, Your fetters, whatever
You bear, 'tis my soul should bear,
For she has well deserved such pains.
Yet you do even for my sake
On you, in love, the burdens take
That weighed my spirit to the ground:
Yes You are made a curse for me
That I might yet be blest through Thee:
My healing in Your wounds is found."*

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—JOHN 19:1-16.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—152, 581, 580.**

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